DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 409 557 CS 012 905

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Lewis, Warren |
| TITLE | Whole Language and Adult Education. ERIC Digest. |
| INSTITUTION | ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Bloomington, IN. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC. |
| REPORT NO | EDO-CS-97-06 |
| PUB DATE | 97 |
| NOTE | 4p. |
| CONTRACT | RR93002011 |
| AVAILABLE FROM | ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Indiana University, 2905 E. 10th Street, Suite 150, Bloomington, IN 47408-2698. |
| PUB TYPE | ERIC Publications (071) -- Opinion Papers (120) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Adult Education; *Andragogy; Classroom Techniques; Elementary Secondary Education; Student Development; *Whole Language Approach |
| IDENTIFIERS | Discourse Communities; Educational Issues; ERIC Digests; *Learning Environments; *Theoretical Orientation |

ABSTRACT

This digest argues that whole language theorists and adult education theorists have much in common, much to say to one another, and much to learn from one another. The digest first defines and discusses "whole language," then defines and discusses "andragogy," (the learning of adults) and finally asks educators to recognize that the "two universes of discourses" are one so that the net result is that education becomes transformative. Contains 12 references. (NKA)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

# ERIC Digest

Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication EDO-CS-97-06

Indiana University
2805 E. 10th Street, Suite 150
Bloomington, Indiana 47408-2698
(812) 855-5847; (800) 759-4723

D125

## Whole Language and Adult Education

ED 409 557

CS 017 905

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC Digest

Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication EDO-CS-97-06

Indiana University
2805 E. 10th Street, Suite 150
D125
Bloomington, Indiana 47408-2698
(812) 855-5847; (800) 759-4723

# Whole Language and Adult Education

By Warren Lewis

This Digest argues that Whole Language theorists and adult education theorists have much in common, much to say to one another, and much to learn from one another.

"Whole Language" (WL), a theory of language instruction that was developed primarily in terms of helping young children learn to read, has now been extended to middle- and secondary-school levels. Andragogy, "the learning of adults," is a specific theory of adult education, conceived more or less in contradistinction to pedagogy, "the teaching of children." When one juxtaposes these two universes of educational discourse, however, one finds that the commonplaces of WL and of andragogy as theories of instruction are similar, if not identical. "In both fields the same debates rage about the whole language approach versus the word recognition, decoding, or phonics approach," as well (Sticht & McDonald, 1992). Recognition of this parallel of theories has arisen relatively recently, although work done by the National Reading Project could be said to have been moving in this direction for 20 years. Teachers whose students are adults, such as ESL teachers, ABE teachers, prison educators, and workplace trainers have been among those who see the match between WL theory and its andragogical implications (Connell, 1992; Weibel, 1994; Peyton & Crandall, 1995). Prison educators have observed the galvanizing impact of whole literature on the incarcerated, prompting strong, existential responses, engaging them in literacy learning. The National Family Literacy Center in Louisville, Kentucky, makes use of WL as an ideal means to teach literacy to adults and to children at the same time. Thus, what began on the one side as a theory about children learning to read, and on the other side as a theory about adults learning as adults, may be seen to coalesce in a statement about humans learning.

David Kring, reflecting on Constance Weaver's WL approach in "Reading Process and Practice" (1988), observed the similarities between WL and adult education and commented: "As the discussion turns to WL in the text, I almost feel as though it is a discussion of Adult Ed foundations...As we discuss the problems of a failing education system for the children, perhaps we might ask how we could teach children using adult ed methodologies; but, then, it appears that WL may have already achieved this!" (Kring, 1994).

Warren Lewis is Chair of the Humanities Divison at Martin University, Indianapolis.

## *What is Whole Language?*

According to its advocates (Brockman, 1994; Strickland & Strickland, 1993), WL is a new paradigm of progressivist instruction in continuity with Rousseau's romantic naturalism, John Dewey's democratic pragmatism, Jean Piaget's observation that children learn on their own, and Lev Vygotsky's and others' social constructivism collaborative interaction in learning. Among other aspects, WL involves transactional models of teaching (as opposed to transmission or banking (Freire) and learning (interaction with text and language, collaboration with co-learners, engagement for learning on account of real reasons).

Students learn to read by reading whole pieces of enjoyable literature and maintaining the natural wholeness of language (as opposed to prepackaged worksheets and skill-and-drill behaviorist approaches). Student-centered learning (as opposed to scripted curricula imposed by authorities from outside of the classroom) takes place as students construct their own meaning of the world around them (as opposed to memorization or imitation or reproduction of the teacher's knowledge); learning is risk-taking, exploratory, welcoming of the potential in errors for new learning.

The text focus is on authentic and meaningful texts (student-produced texts, as in the language experience method; invented spelling; self-published texts; and context-specific texts of high interest with immediate application to young readers' lives). Learning to read is reading for the sake of comprehension, with real purposes in mind, and learning to write is writing for real audiences; learning to read and write is integrated with simultaneous (as opposed to sequential) learning in other disciplines in across-the-curriculum fashion and in context with the development of other abilities (reading-and-writing to learn; listening and speaking as part of reading and writing; language learning in terms of other content areas).

The teacher in a WL classroom is seen as a facilitator, demonstrator, and co-reader, an active participant in the learning community, who teaches students rather than subject matter and who watches for teachable moments of student readiness to learn. Assessment in the WL classroom takes place collaboratively and individually as students evaluate themselves and others, guided by, and in communication with, their instructor, for the purpose of adding to the learning experience and growing (as opposed to supplying authorities and other stakeholders with statistics).

## *What is Andragogy?*

Andragogy as a theory of adult education is represented in numerous

CS012505

entries in the ERIC database; it is most often associated with the name Malcolm Knowles, who did not invent the term but did bring it into currency (Houle, 1992). Knowles summarized andragogy as follows:

> The theoretical presuppositions of andragogy are that andragogical learning is increasingly self-directed in the learner. The learner's own experiences are used as a rich resource for learning... Readiness to learn arises from life's tasks and problems.... Motivation is the adult learner's own internal incentives and curiosity.
>
> The procedural elements of andragogy include a climate of relaxed, trusting, informal, warm, mutually respectful, and collaborative support. Planning, diagnosis of needs, and setting of objectives, while designed primarily by the teacher, are carried out by both teacher and learners through mutual assessment and negotiation and learning contracts and projects sequenced by the learner's readiness. Learning activities include inquiry projects, independent study, and experiential techniques. Evaluation is based on learner-collected evidence, validated by peers and facilitators, the latter being expert in applying criterion-referenced norms. (Knowles, 1991).

### *The Two Universes of Discourse Are One*

Andragogues and WL advocates alike will recognize the respective descriptions of their two camps, and they will assent to the assertion that both WL and andragogy concur in the following--self-directed learning (Grow, 1991), the sense that the learner's interest and needs, abilities, and styles of learning are controlling the learning experience (as opposed to the teacher and the learning experience controlling the learner), is of uppermost importance. David Caverly corrects rhetorical excess on both sides to say that neither andragogy nor WL is wholly "self-directed," but that both are, in a Vygotskian constructivist sense, "learning communities" in which the teacher/expert "guides but does not limit" the learning of the student/novice (whether adult or child), and "both novice and expert grow and learn" and the goals of both are realized (Caverly, 1994).

In both environments, learning is focused within the context of the learner's world of reference in terms of his or her own needs, interests, desires, aesthetics, and social-political aspirations (as opposed to "covering a curriculum" or studying only what the teacher dictates as important to be learned). Adults, when they have not been infantilized by returning to the school room, demand that their learning be according to their own agenda, and this means that the teacher as facilitator must be co-responsive, rather than autocratic, in negotiating the syllabus and planning the work. WL advocates know that children have their preferred agendas, too, and that good teachers take this into account when planning the curriculum.

In the andragogical classroom, adult students learn as much from one another as they do from the teacher, and they tend to nod off if the teacher lectures for too long. In both classrooms, small group discourse multiplies the learning conversations and the communication of knowledge, giving voice to more people than the teacher only. Children and adults alike love to express themselves, and this many-sided discourse continues in the response and commentary of written dialogue journals. Although children have shorter lives upon which to draw, they, too, learn from one another's life experiences, multiple perspectives, respective knowledges--what they bring to their reading is as important as what they take from their reading.

In both the WL and the andragogical classroom, the teacher is not the only source of truth. Real-world reading material is brought to class by students, whether newspapers and forms from work by adults or favorite storybooks by children, and learning becomes participation in "the literacy club." In this way, natural language and interests gain equal time in the hierarchy of the classroom. Learning becomes a collaborative transaction in which all work together, reading real life/authentic/whole literature, producing one's own real/authentic texts, as a part of making up one's own meaning with a little help from friends.

WL theorists and andragogues alike recommend the reading of Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970), to make the pedagogy of children more andragogical, and to keep the andragogy of adults from being oppressive. The net result is that education becomes transformative (Mezirow, 1991).

## References


Brockman, Beth (1994). "Whole Language: A Natural for the Adult Education Classroom." [ED 376 428]

Caverly, David (1994). Private communication with the author, June 19, 1994.

Connell, James V., Ed. (1992). "Summary of Research on Implementing Whole Language Learning in Adult Basic Education Settings." [ED 355 357]

Grow, Gerald (1991). "Teaching Learners to Be Self-Directed." *Adult Education Quarterly*, 41(3), 125-49. [EJ 428 043]

Houle, Cyril O. (1992). *The Literature of Adult Education: A Bibliographical Essay*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. [ED 351 572]

Knowles, Malcolm (1991). in *Adult Education: Evaluation and Achievements in a Developing Field of Study*. John M. Peters, ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. [ED 353 467]

Kring, David (1994). Private communication with the author, November 4, 1994.

Mezirow, Jack (1991). *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. [ED 353 469]

Peyton, Joy, and JoAnn Crandall (1995). "Philosophies and Approaches in Adult ESL Literacy Instruction." ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Foreign Languages and Linguistics. [ED 386 960]

Sticht, Thomas G., and Barbara A. McDonald (1992). "Teaching Adults to Read," in *What Research Has to Say about Reading Instruction*, S. Jay Samuels and Alan E. Farstrup, eds. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. [ED 340 011]

Strickland, Kathleen, and James Strickland (1993). *Uncovering the Curriculum: Whole Language in Elementary and Postsecondary Classrooms*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook. [ED 365 949]

Weibel, Marguerite Crowley (1994). "Literature, Whole Language, and Adult Literacy Instruction: A Lesson from the Elementary Classroom." *Adult Learning*, 6(2), 9-12. [EJ 492 497]



This publication was prepared with partial funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract number RR93002011. Contractors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgment in professional and technical matters. Points of view or opinions, however, do not necessarily represent the official view of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement.